

QINC Influenza 2003-2004 Update for the Elderly

Frequently asked questions:

Q: What are the identified strains of this season's influenza?

A: **The inactivated trivalent vaccine includes A/Moscow (H3N2-like), A/New Caledonia (H1N1-like) and B/HongKong antigens. For the A/Moscow, suppliers used antigenetically equivalent A/Panama (H3N2). However, as influenza erupted, it became apparent that A/FUGIAN-type (H3N2) is also prevalent and not completely covered by the vaccine. Influenza B has proven to be milder.**

Q: Why do some individuals who have had their influenza shot still get "the flu"?

A: **The 2003-2004 vaccine does not contain the exact viral strain subtype (A/Fugian) that is suspected of infecting most of the cases in the United States (see above explanation). It is believed that some related protection is acquired to the Fugian-like strain by administration of the vaccine.**

Even when perfectly matched with the erupted strain, the vaccine isn't expected to be 100% protective. If immunized, we expect 70-90% of healthy adults younger than 65, to be protected. Older adults may mount a less effective immune response.

Q: Who are the licensed manufacturers of the vaccine?

A: **There are only three manufacturers of the vaccine. Aventis Pasteur makes Fluzone, Chiron produces Fluvirin and MedImmune has introduced FluMist for populations from 5-49 years of age.**

Q: How long is someone with the flu contagious?

A: **Adults are considered contagious from 1 day before developing symptoms to up to 7 days after symptoms are gone, children should be considered contagious for up to 10 days after getting sick.**

Q: How do I tell the difference between the flu and a cold?

A: **Colds usually begin slowly, with a scratchy throat, sneezing and runny nose. A mild cough may develop several days later and low-grade fever may be present in adults. Duration of a cold is generally from 2-7 days.**

Onset of influenza is sudden. Headache and dry cough can be coupled with a runny nose and sore throat. Muscles ache and extreme fatigue sets in. The dry cough may worsen. Temperature can reach 101 - 104 degrees F. Symptoms last from 3 days to 2 weeks.

Q: What complications are being reported in long term care?

A: **Secondary bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, worsening of chronic medical conditions and falls.**

Q: What are some common precautions we can post for staff, besides an annual “flu shot”?

A: **Influenza is highly contagious, especially when you consider viral shedding during the periods of communicability.**

The virus grows in the nose. Covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing, and then washing the hands for as long as it takes to sing *Happy Birthday* twice, will help.

Wash hands often. Sing Happy Birthday twice.

Get adequate sleep, eat well and exercise to help raise immunity. On the other hand, smoking decreases your resistance. Try to cut back.

Don't drink from someone else's glass.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Avoid contact with sick people if possible, and stay home if you have the flu.

References:

Centers for Disease Control; <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

National Network for Immunization Information;
<http://www.immunizationinfo.org>

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